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Rose, Laura Martin

Ku Klux Klan

West Point, Miss.

[1909]

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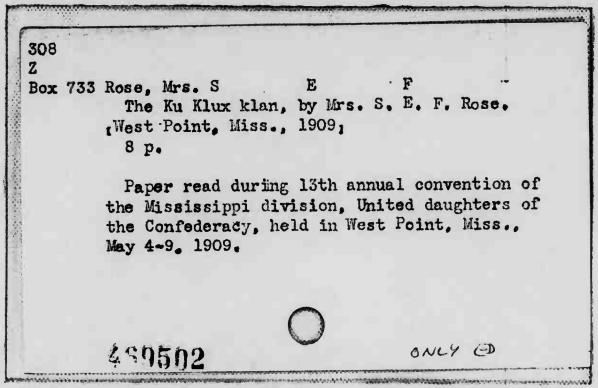

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The Ku Klux klan, by Mrs. S. E. F. Rose.
[West Point, Miss., 1909]
8 p.

Paper read during 13th annual convention of the Mississippi division, United daughters of the Confederacy, held in West Point, Miss., May 4-9, 1909.

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This paper was read on Historical Evening, May 5, 1909, during the thirteenth annual convention of the Mississippi Division, United Daughters of the Confederacy, held in West Point, Miss., May 4-9, 1909. A resolution was passed by the Division authorizing its publication in booklet form, to be sold and the proceeds to go to the erection of a monument at Beauvoir, Miss. (the home of Jefferson Davis) to the memory of Confederate veterans.

The Ku Klux Klan

BY

MRS. S. E. F. ROSE, HISTORIAN MISS., DIVISION U. D. C.

The "Ku Klux Klan"—the very name holds one spellbound. It is strange, weird, mysterious, fascinating. Formed from the Greek word Kuklos—meaning a circle—the name was prophetic of the great mission of the Klan, for it indeed formed a circle of protection around the homes and women of the South and brought them through the dark shadows of Reconstruction days, safe and unharmed. Let us think, then, of the Ku Klux Klan as a great circle of light, illuminated with deeds of love and patriotism, and holding within its protecting and shining circlet the very life and welfare of our beloved Southland.

It is for the sake of the home that almost all things are wrought and achieved. It was the home instinct that prompted the valiant Virginians, the persistent Puritans and the determined Dutch to dare the waves of an unknown and uncharted sea and come to America where they hoped to find an opportunity for the establishment of that for which their hearts yearned—a home. Upon these sacred principles—love and protection of home—was founded the Ku Klux Klan, and no organization ever held loftier ideas or nobler purposes. It was composed of the soldiers of the Confederacy, who, for four years, had thrilled the world with their deeds of courage and valor, and returning to their desolated homes, were forced to confront the war penalty imposed upon the states of the Confederacy—slave confiscation and reconstruction under African rule.

In the midst of this dark drama, we behold a ray of light, the star of hope gleams again through the clouds, by which it had been obscur-

ed. The Ku Klux Klan, the great, silent organization of the '60's, appears upon the scene with its avowed purpose, to preserve and uphold the white civilization of the South. It was a creation born of necessitous times, of pure and patriotic impulses, and to relieve a dire and humiliating distress. The Ku Klux Klan has been justly called the salvation of the South and its history should be written in letters of light. It has been said that the methods of the Night Riders are similar to those of the Ku Klux Klan, but never was anything more erroneous. There is no similarity except, perhaps, the secrecy, the moving at night and the masked figures, and there it ends. The methods of the Ku Klux Klan were generally peaceful and without undue destruction to life and property, and when its object had been accomplished, there was no persecution, nor pillaging, nor hounding of any one. And when tranquillity was restored to the land, the Klan "folded their tents like the Arabs, and as silently stole away."

Many outrages were committed in the name of the Ku Klux by parties who did not belong to the Klan; reckless firebrands, with private hatreds to appease, and having the audacity to call themselves Ku Klux. Thus the impression was made that the Ku Klux were a set of vicious men with no regard for law or order; but these outrages were committed by bands of thieving scalawags, who used the name as a cloak for their evil deeds. No genuine Ku Klux would have been guilty of a deed or an act that would bring the blush of shame to any brave or honorable man. They belonged to the best class of citizens, once soldiers of the Confederacy, who had only the best interests of society in view, and would scorn to do a mean or cowardly act. Nothing in connection with the war, or rather the period at the close of the war known as Reconstruction days, is of greater interest than the Ku Klux Klan. Its mystery was so fascinating that stories of this great organization were always listened to with eagerness and delight. Those delightful books, "The Clansman," and its sequel, "The Traitor," given us by Thomas J. Dixon, have a most intense and thrilling interest. "The Clansman" places before us the real Klan, with its high and noble purposes and shows the great good accomplished by them, while "The Traitor," in striking contrast, shows the bogus Klan and its many evil deeds, which inspired such a reign of terror. Since these books have been dramatized and presented in so many places, renewed interest has been awakened and a deep impression has been made on the minds and the hearts of the people, and they have done much to clear the atmosphere of the many false stories told of the Ku Klux. In the play, the white robes of the original Klan, and the red robes of the spurious Klan leave a

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deep, vivid and lasting impression. The colors were deeply significant. White, the symbol of purity, was most appropriate for the real Klan, organized to protect the homes and liberties of the South, while red, always the badge of bloodshed, anarchy and disorder, was most fitting for the bogus Klan, whose deeds were disgraceful and villainous.

There are many conflicting statements in regard to the origin of the Ku Klux Klan. It has been stated that General N. B. Forrest was the originator, but this is a mistake. The Klan had been in existence nearly a year, and had spread so rapidly it embraced nearly the whole South, so a leader was looked for, and all eyes were turned to the hero soldier, who had so gallantly led the brave men of the South—General Nathan Bedford Forrest—and he was made Grand Wizard of the Invisible Empire. Gen. George W. Gordon of Memphis, prepared the oath and ritual for the Klan.

It seemed to me that nothing could be more interesting or more valuable in order to preserve the facts for history than to have the story of the organization from the lips of the survivors themselves. There are now living only two of the little band of six Confederate soldiers, who, in the little town of Pulaski, Tenn., in the winter of '65 and '66, organized the order of the Ku Klux Klan. These two are Maj. Jas. R. Crowe, of Sheffield, Ala., and Mr. John B. Kennedy, of Lawrenceburg, Tenn. I have letters from each of them, and will read them, giving the words from their own pens; which is certainly the truth of history. Before reading the letters, I will say a few words about the little town which formed the setting for this great order, Pulaski, Tenn. I will quote from Senator Bob Taylor in his famous speech before the Tennessee Society in New York in 1907: "When the Lord banished the guilty pair from Paradise and closed the jasper gates behind them, loth to destroy its beauties, he transferred them all to Tennessee. The foot of man never trod the sod of any spot of earth where purer fountains gem the hills and brighter streams, falling from loftier heights, wind their shining way through greener, sweeter vales. The sun of heaven never shone upon a fairer land or a nobler people. It is said that Tennesseans never sing 'There is a better land,' for they do not believe there is one." I will state just here that I am proud that my native town, Pulaski, Tenn., was the birthplace of the splendid organization that bore the name "The Ku Klux Klan." The letters are as follows:

Sheffield, Ala., Oct. 25, 1908.

Mrs. Laura Martin Rose,

My dear Madam: Your letter in regard to the origin and object of

the Ku Klux Klan was received in due time. It affords me pleasure to comply with your request. I am glad to see the U. D. C. taking so much interest in getting a correct history of the eventful days of '61 to '65. You would, no doubt, be surprised to know the number of letters I receive from various parts of our country in regard to the Ku Klux Klan. The order was organized in Pulaski, Tenn., in the winter of 1865 and '66 in the office of Major Thomas M. Jones, by the following named men, all of whom had honorable records as Confederate soldiers: Richard R. Reed, John B. Kennedy, John C. Lester, Frank O. McCord, Calvin Jones and James R. Crowe.

Frank O. McCord was the first Grand Cyclops, I was the next officer in rank, which was Grand Turk. We held several meetings at the office of Judge Jones; then we held several meetings at the home of your grand-father, Mr. Thomas Martin. Afterwards our regular den was made in the old residence of Dr. Benjamin Carter. The house had been wrecked by a tornado, only one room left and that was hidden by the debris of the large building. The house was supposed to be haunted. This served our purpose well, as we played upon the superstitious and made them believe we were the spirits of dead Confederates. The word Ku Klux was coined by us. We chose the Greek word for circle—Kuklos, as the name of our circle and afterwards called it Ku Klux, then added Klan, and made it from that day historical. The younger generation will never fully realize the risk we ran and sacrifices we made to free our beloved Southland from the hated rule of the "carpetbagger," the worse negro and the home Yankee. Thank God, our work was rewarded by complete success. After the order grew to large numbers, we found it was necessary to have some one of large experience to command. We chose Gen. N. B. Forrest, who had joined our number. He was made a member and took the oath in room number ten of the Maxwell House at Nashville, Tenn., in the fall of 1866, nearly a year after we organized at Pulaski. The oath was administered to him by Capt. John W. Morton, afterwards Secretary of State, Nashville, Tenn. There is only one besides myself of the original six who organized the Ku Klux Klan, Mr. John B. Kennedy, of Lawrenceburg, Tenn. If you will write to him he could give you more information. Trusting the sketch I have given will help you in your work, I am,

Sincerely, your friend,

JAMES R. CROWE.

Lawrenceburg, Tenn., March 15, 1909.

Mrs. S. E. F. Rose,

Dear Madam: Your kind letter reached me yesterday, and I hasten to reply, for we old Ku Klux appreciate any interest manifested in our order. The Ku Klux Klans were composed of the very best citizens of our country; their mission was to protect the weak and oppressed during the dark days of reconstruction. To protect the women of the South, who were the loveliest, most noble and best women in the world. The survivors are all old men now, old with their memories of other days long past, to cheer them during life's twilight. They are proud they were Ku Klux and could give aid to those dear Southern women again during the reconstruction period, for it was a dark and distressing era in our beloved Southland. We did nothing to make us ashamed; our acts were always for the good of our country and those we loved. After the lapse of all these years, the survivors of the Ku Klux Klan are gratified to hear the verdict of many who say to us, "Well done; you undoubtedly saved the beautiful Southland during the reconstruction era." It is pleasing to us, for we did our duty as we saw it then; we are grateful for the kind appreciation and interest of our people now. Pardon me for speaking once again of the dear, Southern women, the heroines, who so bravely bore the heavy burdens and hardships of those long years of war. The world has never known lovelier, braver women than they were. They were ministering angels to the soldiers. They were our inspiration then and will live in our hearts forever. Their memory is a sweet benediction to our lives as we near the last river. Wo would say to you younger women, teach your children to love and honor the memory of those noble women of the South, the women of the '60's. Wishing you much success in securing facts and truths for your history, I am willing to give any information possible.

Yours truly,

JOHN B. KENNEDY.

From these letters we see that at first this circle was formed for social pleasure and recreation, and on discovering that the queer costumes, the great secrecy and weird mystery operated on the minds of the ignorant and vicious negroes and undesirable whites, they turned their objects into more useful channels The element of superstition in the negro and the bold villainy of the depraved white man were appealed to and the one was scared nearly to death, while the other gradually disappeared. The Ku Klux knew the character of the whites and blacks with whom they had to deal, and with each they used the needed treatment. Initiation into this order is said to have tried the souls of men and tested their courage as no other secret order before, or since, has done. They bound themselves to allegiance to the laws of the United States. The question then arises, Why a secret organization? Because ex-Confederates were denied the right of ballot, the right to tes-

tify in court or to carry fire-arms. There were negro soldiers, legislators and magistrates, and as negroes held all offices, the white men were completely at their mercy, and they could tie them up by their thumbs whenever they chose. The only thing to do in order to preserve some form of just government and have some degree of freedom was to organize a compact secret body to do what openly they could not do.

There is a copy of the oath and ritual in the possession of a lady in Tennessee, whose husband was an honored member of the Klan. She said he gave it to her when she was a girl-bride, telling her to preserve these papers, for some day they would be history. I wrote asking her if she would not, for the sake of history, give me a copy. She replied that she regretted not being able to comply with my request, as she was not able to write it herself, and prized the papers too highly to permit them out of her possession for even one hour, in order to have a typewritten copy made. She said that her Ku Klux papers together with her husband's sword and parole of honor, obtained at Appomatox, Va., were to her, treasures whose price was far above rubies.

The peculiar fascination ever attendant upon things mysterious, was always present with everything connected with the Ku Klux Klan. The Invisible Empire, as the territory under the control of the Klan was called, extended from Virginia to Texas and embraced about fourteen states. The Empire was subdivided into Realms; Realms into Dominions; Dominions into Provinces and Provinces into Dens—corresponding respectively to states, congressional districts, counties and towns.

Each department had its head officer, their duties being definitely designated—except those of the Grand Wizard, the supreme officer—whose control was absolute.

The following is a list of officers and their departments in regular order: The Grand Wizard of the Invisible Empire, assisted by his ten Genii; the Grand Dragon of the Realm and his eight Hydras; the Grand Titan of the Dominion and his six Furies; the Grand Giant of the Province and his four Goblins; the Grand Cyclops of the Den and his two Night Hawks. A Grand Turk, Grand Monk, Grand Exchequer, Grand Scribe and Grand Sentinel were officers in the local Dens. The Genii, Hydras, Furies, Goblins, Night Hawks were staff officers, and the private members were called Ghouls.

Many instances could be related of the good done by the Ku Klux, for in every instance they protected the just rights of the negro as well as the whites, and they stood always for the protection of the menaced life liberty and property of all innocent men. The record of the Ku Klux Klan teaches forcibly two lessons, which are so plain that he who

runs may read. First, the inevitability of Anglo-Saxon supremacy, when harassed by bands of outlaws, thugs, carpet-baggers and guerillas, turned loose on the South and upheld by political machinery, during the reconstruction period, the sturdy white men of the South, against all odds, maintained white supremacy and secured Caucasian civilization, when its very foundations were threatened within and without. Second, a new revelation of the greatness and genius of Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest, the "Wizard of the Saddle," the great Confederate Cavalry leader. As Grand Wizard of the Invisible Empire, to his splendid leadership was due, more than to any other one thing, the successful carrying out of the high and noble purposes of the real Ku Klux Klan.

How delightful and enchanting were the tales of the Ku Klux, as told by some old black negro Mammy, before a blazing wood fire, and told in a sepulchral whisper, that made the cold chills play up down the back and the marrow almost freeze in one's bones. She would tell you, "These silent riders were sixteen feet tall, with fiery eyes, and unquenchable thirst, never being satisfied with less than two buckets of water for a drink, and honey-chile, dey wuz de awfulles' sight you ever seed in yo' life; and honey-lam', be good, if you don't de Ku Klux will git you." The grotesque costumes, masks, high, conical hats, robes all of white, with red crosses on their breasts, and seen at the dead hour of midnight was enough to frighten anyone, white or black, and the darkies just declared, "'Fore Gawd," the Ku Klux came straight from the bad place. "Old Wash," always interesting in the Taylor-Trotwood magazine, gives in a recent issue the story of his first vision of the Ku Klux. "De niggers wuz all down to de meetin' house, holdin' one o' dese heah distracted meetins. De moon wuz a shinin,' when we seed fru de chu'ch winders some ghost-men on some ghost-hosses comin' outen de woods, one behin' de yudder. Dey, come slow an' solum-like, an' dat night I seed my fust Ku Klux, an' ebery nigger dar seed um, too, an' dey nebber will forgit um. Dem black niggers wuz skeered so bad dat night, dey skin turned white, an' de kinks all come outen dey har. Den de leader, he ride up to de chu'ch do' and de niggers all said, 'Hit's de angel on de fiery steed,' but I said, 'No, hit's Ole Massa dat wuz kilt in de war.' Den de ghost-man, in a low, deep voice, an' pintin' wid his long, bony finger at de watah-bucket, said, 'A drink, please, I haint had nowatah since I wuz kilt in de fust battle of Manassas.' 'Gawd, I sed so, hit's Ole Marster done riz frum de grave. Niggers, quit yo' lyin' an' yo' meanness, an' prepare to meet yo' Gawd.'"

I believe the younger generation should be told the true history of the Ku Klux Klan, and be taught to have the proper respect for this organization, which did so much for the South in her dark days. Our children will be told all the false things concerning it. Let us see to it that they are told the truth. Encyclopedias, books of reference and some histories are full of false statements about the South, and information about the South's part in the war between the States is very meager and unsatisfactory. I plead for a true history of the South—our Southland, so conscious of her rectitude, so firm in her belief that she was "constitutionally and eternally right," and so proud of the heroism of her sons, has not felt the great necessity of vindicating her acts, but it behooves us now to see that the searchlights are turned on her part in the war, and let the world know the truth of her history. And as loyal Daughters of the Confederacy we stand pledged to see that this is done.

Some day when the South comes to her own, when her magnificent resources have been developed and the riches of her mountains and her valleys drawn forth, there will be many great and good things to be said of her history. Men will never tire of speaking of this land of romance, so different in many essential respects from the rest of the country; and women will read with joy and tears the story of her long fought battle for supremacy. But when the tale is all told and the history of her labors in war and peace has been recounted, no brighter chapter in all her history, no fairer page will ever be read, than that which tells of the illustrious and glorious organization, called the "Ku Klux Klan." Let us ever regard our history as a priceless heritage, let us cherish and keep green the traditious of the old South, let us keep alive its chivalrous spirit, and never tire of telling the story of those lion-hearted men, who made this history for us and around whose names cluster some of the greatest events of the past. Gladstone, the great English statesman, said, "No greater calamity can befall a people than to break utterly with its past; and if we forget our ancestors we ourselves are unworthy to be remembered." When the great Napoleon had landed his forces on Egyptian soil and formed them in battle array, lifting his hand high in air and pointing to the Pyramids, he exclaimed: "Soldiers, forty centuries behold you," and when we realize today, the valor of our sires and grandsires, the beauty and culture of our mothers and grandmothers are beholding us, do we not feel that we are indeed treading on holy ground? Is not the history they have made for us our most precious and priceless heritage? To the glorious history of our fair Southland, and especially of our own great Mississippi, and more especially of that remarkable and splendid organization, the Ku Klux Klan, I pay tribute tonight.

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